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THE PROJECT METHOD IN TEACHING, CIVICS

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The Theodore Herzl School is situated in a portion of Chicago which used to be one of the prettiest residence sections of the city. The school is classed as one of the largest and best grammar schools of Chicago.

After the building was erected the problem arose, how to take care of this magnificent structure. It was solved by having each room form itself into a civic club and undertake some specific problem, such as taking care of the corridors, the fountains, the assembly hall, the pianos, the grounds outside, and so on. By developing civic pride and responsibility these clubs have shown not only what can be done to make the Herzl School clean and beautiful, but how to make Chicago itself a better place in which to live.

The cycle of time brought into our district a population many of whose members were not overparticular in keeping their premises clean and sanitary. Although every teacher of the school laid stress on cleanliness and hygiene, it was soon found that something more than daily admonitions was necessary to bring the much desired change. It occurred to me to make the issue a broad civic project to be solved by our clubs. I, therefore, brought the matter before the members at our next civic meeting and urged that they devise some scheme by which to better the existing conditions of the Lawndale district.

The discussion, arguments, and plans were truly interesting. After an outline plan of work was agreed upon, committees were appointed to make a survey of the neighborhood. Lists were made of lots filled with rubbish, of houses having no lawns or trees, of homes having papers and rubbish accumulated about the premises, of unswept streets and littered alleys, and of careless grocers and butchers whose premises could be improved.

At the next meeting the problem of apportioning the work to the various committees faced our little president. As everyone was earnest and ready to put his shoulder to the wheel, this was not so difficult. Someone suggested taking pictures of the uncleaned lots with all their rubbish, then of the lots in the process of cleaning, and again after they were cleaned. This work, of course, took much time outside of school hours, but with the assistance of other civic clubs of the school, it was done systematically and thoroughly. After this hard work was accomplished someone suggested that people living in homes adjoining these vacant lots ought to be instructed not to litter up the premises again. This admonition was duly given.

The attention of the pupils was now turned to lawns. In the manual-training room boys made "Keep off the Grass" signs, which they freely distributed wherever needed. Those landowners who had no lawns were solicited to help us in our project. It was gratifying to have so many co-operate with us.

The back yards were attacked with the same vigor. The improvement of these, however, was very much harder. By writing to the United States Agricultural Department we secured large sacks of vegetable and flower seeds gratis. Committees of pupils set about distributing these. As an inducement for intensive gardening two prizes were offered—one for the best vegetable garden and one for an artistic flower garden. The change that was wrought through this was truly wonderful.

In order to reach all the pupils of the school the various problems that were worked upon by the civic club were presented for co-operation at the weekly assembly meetings. This offered opportunities to write and deliver speeches. No one who had not made his points clear and emphatic was chosen as lecturer for the assembly. This created great competition in address writing.

It is remarkable how one thing suggested another. Someone came with the plan of visiting the neighboring schools and asking for their co-operation. This was done and proved very helpful.

About this time a pupil suggested dramatizing the subject. With persistent effort a play was produced called "The Reforming of a Bad Boy." Appropriate verses were composed by members

of the group and set to the tunes of popular airs. This gave added charm to the play and pleased the class immensely.

At this time the pupils received many complaints from property owners that the garbage collectors were not doing their duty and that the alleys were not in a clean and sanitary condition. To remedy this condition committees were appointed to interview Mr. McGrath, the head of the department. He promised to help us, if we would instruct the people, wherever necessary, to keep their ashes, papers, and rubbish separate. He also agreed to sign warning notices which the pupils might give to those who lacked the proper receptacles.

It was evident now that a mass meeting of the residents of the Lawndale district was necessary. It was decided to invite the two aldermen of the ward, the park commissioner, and Mr. McGrath to address the audience. Accordingly a committee on arrangements went to see these officials, explained the purpose of the meeting, and solicited their aid. The interviews resulted in the promise of a hearty co-operation by all, assuring us of the ultimate success of the mass meeting.

Although a plan of this mass meeting was divulged to all of the pupils of the school during their weekly assembly, yet it was deemed advisable to have bills printed, advertising the time and purpose of the meeting. Accordingly hand bills were planned and printed by the pupils, and posters were made in the art room to advertise the event.

I suggested that since we were to have so many distinguished visitors, we ought to make the evening especially interesting. At once someone said, "Let's give the clean-up play." Another said, "Let's have the president make a speech of welcome." Still another thought that some music ought to be added to the evening's program. All this, properly arranged and executed, made a most interesting program which was heartily appreciated by a very large audience.

However, it was the result of this meeting that interested us the most. Soon after reports of cleaner alleys and yards began to come in. Many people, too, who had hitherto objected to having

the alleys paved withdrew their objection so that now thoroughly sanitary alleys are in the process of construction.

We felt that the results of our project were most gratifying, and that although it took almost five months and much hard labor, it was worth the effort. I have tried to correlate the project problems with almost all the subjects of the course of study and am sure that the pupils gained much in English, oral as well as written composition, civics, hygiene, spelling, manual training, art, and printing. Moreover, the moral influence was inestimable. It is my contention that since the ultimate aim of education is to prepare the child for democracy, the pupil should be given every opportunity to practice democracy in the civic life of the school. There is no reason why the project method could not be used to solve the numberless problems that confront the principal. When educators fully realize the importance of giving the pupils every opportunity of learning citizenship by practicing it in social situations of the school they will have solved the fundamental principles in democratic control of the future citizens of our country.